



Being Processed

Grades 8-12

On-Site Activity

Description:

For many immigrants planning to settle in the United States in the early 20th Century, Ellis Island represented a site where their physical and emotional will were tested. Unfamiliar with their surroundings and the dominant language, these newly-arrived passengers would soon run through a gauntlet of tests to prove themselves “fit” to enter the country. This on-site activity aims to replicate the immigrant experience for students visiting Ellis Island today.

Time Frame:

40-45 minutes

Materials:

- Several copies of the immigrant files (enough copies for each student, pair, or small group depending on your preferences)
- Manila folder for each student, pair, or small group (optional, but adds to the authenticity of the activity)
- Pen and paper for each student

Objectives:

- Describe some of the difficulties immigrants encountered while being processed at Ellis Island.
- Compare immigration processing of a century ago with immigration processing today.
- Evaluate the social resources available to newly-arrived passengers while on Ellis Island.
- Analyze where immigrants could seek assistance at Ellis Island compared to the immigrants of today.

Procedure:

1. Motivation- Upon arriving to Ellis Island, ask students to recall their first day at middle school or high school. What were some of their feelings/apprehensions when they arrived in their new school? Help your students remember registering for classes, filling out registration cards, and finding their way around the building that first week. Be ready for students to share their hopes/anxieties with the class. Inform the class that many newly-arrived immigrants share many of these worries when they apply for entry to this country. (This can be done on the front steps of the main building or other designated group meeting place on the island).
2. With the mood established, inform students that they will each be given an “immigrant file” of someone who was processed at Ellis Island roughly a century ago. (Immigrant files should be printed and attached (glue, tape, paper clips, etc.) inside a manila file folder prior to the visit for a more authentic feel.) Invite the group to look at their file and the space through the mindset of immigrants enduring the rigors of being examined. **Reinforce the difficulties of the boat ride and the uncertainty of entering a space where you do not speak the dominant language. (i.e.: How would you communicate with others? Who could you turn to for help?)** *Note: Once folders have been distributed, have extra chaperones stationed at each of the exhibits on the second floor; chaperones need to remain with students at all times.*
3. With their brief immigrant descriptions (the immigrant file) carefully read, students will begin the journey as the immigrant in the immigrant file. Depending on the immigrant file used, students will follow the traditional immigrant path: start in the baggage room, proceed up to the Registry Room (also known as the Great Hall) on the second floor, head to the exhibit *Through America’s Gate*, and end at the Graffiti Walls on the third floor or *Peak Immigration Years* on the second floor. *Note: Although the group will be supplied with clear directions, the trick for the educator will be to peruse the space to ensure that students are on task. Thus, chaperones will play an essential role in this activity.* Inform students to meet at a designated area once they are finished with their immigrant journey.
4. Assessment Evidence: Following the activity, invite students to have an open-ended discussion in the Great Hall or any open space outside. Ask the group for their impressions of the site and of their immigrant file. While facilitating the conversation, consider asking the students the following questions:
 - How do the different approaches in processing reflect the concerns residents in the United States had at that time?

- In what ways did mutual aid societies assist immigrants in getting settled in the United States?
 - If you were a high-ranking government official, how would you feel about the ways in which immigrants were being processed?
5. With time permitting, much of the conversation can be contemporized to talk about immigration today. Teachers can facilitate a discussion to include more of a current focus. Think about several of the questions listed below:
- Where do you think immigrants can turn to for help today? Do you think these resources are sufficient?
 - Do you think immigrants today have an easier or harder time settling in the United States? Why?
 - What challenges do immigrants face in your local community today?
 - What are the main resources immigrants rely on today?
6. Homework ideas (optional): Each student will compose a one-to-two paragraph summary describing their experience at Ellis Island. Each student will factor the importance of social resources and networks for immigrants, past and present, as they settle in the United States in their paper. Further, students will research potential social services or institutions that assist immigrants in their communities today, and determine whether these services are adequate. Students are expected to consider both sides of the issue before making a decision.

OR

Students will write a one-to-two paragraph statement about being processed at Ellis Island from the perspective of the immigrant from the file. Each student will detail the different procedures administered to immigrants, and determine whether this process was necessary. Additionally, students will research the current criteria immigrants have to undergo today and decide which is more difficult given the political climate. Responses should be evaluated on how evenly both sides are considered.

* Please note that unless otherwise noted, all photographs belong to the National Park Service. The individuals depicted in the immigrant files, although designed to be representative of real people and situations, are fictional and were created solely for this exercise.